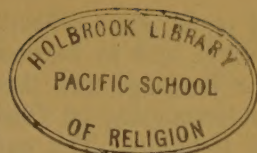


# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM



No. 27

MAY 1st, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

Amid the daily anxieties of the war in the West we are apt to forget that the same tragedy is being enacted on the other side of the world in the Far East. For two years the leaders of the Student Christian Movements in China and Japan have invited their members to observe together a special day of prayer. The spirit in which this day has been observed is illustrated by the following prayer composed by one of the women leaders of the movement in Japan.

"Our Father, we are thinking of our friends in China who must also be praying to you now. The thought reminds us of Jesus' teaching that unity in spirit is unbreakable while worldly spirit is often affected by material circumstances. For this we thank you and ask you to lead us into deeper understanding. Show us what to do in this present trouble, and help us to make friendship between us more real and stronger so that we may together share your work in building the Kingdom of God. May God bless Christian fellow students in China, and also comfort those who are in uttermost suffering! In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen."

## NON-ARYANS IN GERMANY

The Nazi authorities are deliberately aiming at the total expulsion of all Jews and "non-Aryans" from Germany. In the middle of February the whole Jewish population of the district of Stettin, amounting to about 1,200 persons including some Christian families, was deported to the Lublin reservation without previous warning. They had to leave in the middle of the night and were allowed to take only one small suitcase and no money or food. There were no houses or barracks to receive them and the only shelter to be had was in stables and barns. Out of the 1,200 who were transported it is known that 280 died within a short period; over 70 of them were frozen to death in their march. It is understood that preparations for a similar deportation of non-Aryans from Eastern Prussia and Silesia have been made.

In spite of almost insurmountable difficulties relief efforts have been organised by the German churches. A bureau has been set up in Berlin with a staff of nearly thirty people giving their services for the most part honorarily. Branch offices have been established in the chief provinces of Germany. It is estimated that at the beginning of this year there were still about 200,000 non-Aryans in Germany (not including Austria). About 30,000 of these were evangelical Christians. The relief bureau has done its utmost to provide help both in immediate relief and in assistance to emigrate.

## THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of this week's Supplement, H. A. Hodges, is Professor of Philosophy at Reading University. He is still well under forty. The paper is the outcome



of many years reflection on his personal experience of Christianity. Some of you may find it, and in particular the latter part, somewhat stiff. This is not so much because the language and thought of the paper are difficult as because they present a deep understanding of Christianity which is beyond our experience and accustomed ways of thinking. The paper will reward careful and repeated reading.

## NEWS-LETTER POSTAGE

The new Budget doubles the cost of postage of the News-Letter and leaves us with a serious problem. The extra halfpenny will cost us more than £20 a week, which the News-Letter cannot stand. It is not easy to see the best solution of the problem.

One possibility is to increase the rate of new subscriptions by 2s. a year and ask existing subscribers to allow us to advance by a proportionate period the date of the termination of their subscription. With our present membership, this would still leave an additional charge of over £80 a year to be borne by the News-Letter.

Alternatively we might reduce the amount of matter supplied each week, e.g., let you have a Supplement once a fortnight instead of once a week. We have had a large number of letters from our members saying that, much as they appreciate the News-Letter, it often contains more than they are able to digest in a week. They might therefore rather welcome the suggested reduction of matter. On the other hand, there are groups that meet weekly for the study of the News-Letter. Would a fortnightly instead of a weekly Supplement upset their programme? This solution would, however, need careful examination. The saving in paper and printing would only partially meet the extra cost of postage.

In the meantime we should welcome your advice. It will help us in reaching a decision. I wish it had been possible to consult you before postcards cost twopence instead of a penny, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his decision after the last issue was printed.

Yours sincerely,

*J. H. Oldham*

## BOUND VOLUMES

We are binding a limited number of copies of Nos. 0 to 26 of the Christian News-Letter in attractive green cloth with gold lettering and are preparing a full index. The cost until the end of May will be 8s. 6d. post free, and only 250 copies will be available.

We can also arrange for members' copies to be bound for them. The cost of binding the 26 issues in paper boards with coloured lettering and supplying an index will be 2s. 6d. post free. The binding has to take place at one time and there may, therefore, be a little delay in returning the copies sent. Members' sets should reach us before the 31st May, accompanied by a remittance. We are prepared to supply missing issues at 3d. each, but cannot guarantee this. Owing to the difficulty of paper supplies we cannot reprint back numbers.

**Subscriptions.**—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 10s. (\$3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

**THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.**



MAY 1st, 1940

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CHRISTIANITY MAKE?

Last autumn I was present at a meeting of the Student Christian Movement, where someone said: What question, if any, does the ordinary non-Christian student ask the Christian about his faith? The answer given was that he asks: What have you, as a Christian, got that I have not got? It was added that this was a hard question to answer in any case, and all the harder when the questioner does not really feel that there is anything he lacks, and therefore is not very interested in the answer.

### IS BROTHERLY LOVE ENOUGH?

This episode impressed me, especially when I contrasted it with the placid assurance of so many of the official spokesmen of Christianity, who make the most sweeping claims without showing that they really see what these claims involve. They say again and again that Christianity, and only Christianity, has the solution of the world's problems; but when it comes to details their teaching often seems to boil down to this—that the world would be all right if we all acted in the spirit of brotherly love, and that this is what Christianity has to tell us.

I find myself driven to dispute both these statements. The world will not be made right by an infusion of brotherly love, for two reasons. First, because whatever effect Christianity may have in changing the lives of individuals, the idea that a radical change will take place in so many individuals as to alter the tone and structure of society is quite utopian. Second, because even if that utopian change did take place, the problem of running the world in justice and equity would still require intelligence and practical skill no less than good will. The gospel that good will is the one thing

needful is so clearly false that people who see its falsehood have been driven away from Christianity because they have been led to think that it was the Christian teaching. But I quarrel also with the idea that this is the Christian teaching. William Blake, whose queer mythology conceals a vein of real Christian insight, put the point in a nutshell when he said, "If moral virtue was Christianity, Socrates was the Saviour." Blake was protesting against conventional morality in the name of the gospel of universal forgiveness, which he regarded as the real Christian teaching; but his own phrase can be turned against himself, and we can say, "If brotherly love or universal forgiveness was Christianity, Buddha was the Saviour." For Christ has no monopoly of moral wisdom.

Christianity has other things to say than this, and it does not offer them as the solution of the world's problems. Rather it begins by saying that the world concerns itself with the wrong problems, that the problems which worry us most are foolish problems which are no more capable of being solved than the ancient problem of how to eat one's cake and have it. Christianity does not promise to solve these, but it does promise to satisfy the deepest needs of our nature, needs to which we are often blind, which are hidden from us by all the pother we make about things on the surface.

### PESSIMISM OF THE WISE

Behind the parade of official optimism about life which false philosophies and false religions (often camouflaged as Christianity) have conspired to make, there is a continuous and impressive stream of tradition which says that life is futile and meaning-



less, that the good in it is superficial and the evil profound. "There are tears in things," says Virgil. "The world has still much good, but much less good than ill," says A. E. Housman. In the words of the greatest of the Greek dramatists, "Not to be born is the best thing of all, and by far the next best is, if we are born, to go as soon as we can thither whence we came." And the book which says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is part of our Bible. In the same book it is written: "I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive; yea, better than both did I esteem him which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." This is not the peevish wail of childish minds. It is the well-weighed verdict of some of the men of deepest insight in the history of the race. In times of general prosperity, when life goes easily on the surface, most people are content to stay on the surface and enjoy the visible benefits of life, and the deep pessimism of the wise is driven underground. In disturbed times like our own, when the things on which the ordinary man has relied are found to let him down, he, too, is increasingly led to feel what the wise of all ages have felt, and their mood, though not, unhappily, their wisdom, comes to be widely shared.

The accusations brought against life by the wise of all ages are more plainly echoed to-day than they have been for a very long time past, and they come home to all of us in a personal way, for they strike into the very stuff of our daily life. They are most obvious in the widespread experience of moral confusion and frustration. Not only do we find it hard to make good motives prevail over bad ones in ourselves (that has always been the case), but, owing to the complex circumstances of modern life, we feel that we cannot, with the best will in the world, do good without doing evil at the same time. This is a terrible discovery for those who take the distinction between right and wrong seriously. It leads to helplessness bewilderment in concrete cases where we have to make a choice, and it leads some to suspect that, after all, the distinction between right and wrong may be a fiction.

## OUR PRESENT TROUBLES

We may classify our troubles roughly under four heads:—

(1) It is an old observation that virtue often turns to the undoing of those who have it. Not merely does prosperity come to the wicked and distress to the righteous, but the prosperity of the wicked is due to their wickedness, and the distresses of the righteous are the result of their righteousness. Is it not clear to the blindest eye to-day that the tolerant, the fair-minded, the peace-loving are taken advantage of, and that selfishness, supported by force and fraud, has a dreadful efficiency? So much so that the unselfish cast of mind is widely despised and denounced as fit only for slaves.

(2) If the issues in which we have to make decisions were obvious issues between right and wrong, life would be simpler and easier than it is. In actual fact we can seldom, if ever, find an issue in which all the right is on one side. We have constantly to choose between rival courses of action, both of which appear to have a claim upon us. We cannot do justice to the one without neglecting the other. Moreover, in both courses there may be something from which we ought to shrink. The choices we have to make, including some which are forced upon every one in these days, are choices not between right and wrong, but between right and right, and at the same time between wrong and wrong. War is evidently a great evil, and cannot be waged without injuring many people; but we cannot refuse to make war upon a State which acts unjustly without being accomplices in the injustice which our warlike action might have prevented or redressed. We have therefore to choose between two wrongs. Or again, many Christians are convinced that there is a need of drastic social changes, and that the changes called for are in the general direction represented by the political Left. But the only Left movement which has anywhere shown itself able to take power and make sweeping reforms is that movement which is inseparably bound up with militant atheism. Such Christians thus have to choose between what they think socially right but



religiously wrong and what they think religiously right but socially wrong. There are numberless similar cases where the conflict of obligations, e.g., between Church and State, between State and individual, between public justice and personal equity, makes a perfectly satisfactory moral choice impossible.

(3) It is possible to do the same thing with various motives, some better and some worse. In every kind of public life we have to act with others, and take our share of responsibility for the common action. If I decide, on grounds which are morally pure, in favour of a certain course, it may easily happen that others with whom I shall be working will have chosen that course with unworthy motives and in the hope of getting from it some disreputable profit to themselves. At what point ought I to refuse to act with people who want what I want, but for the wrong reasons? For if I do not act with them, I am refusing to do what seems to me right, and if I do act with them I am helping them to do what seems to me wrong.

(4) It is easy to misjudge what will be the moral effect of one's actions, and to do for laudable reasons what turns out to encourage evil. The present régime in Germany is evil, and it could have been overthrown with comparative ease by Anglo-French action before the building of the Siegfried Line. The motives which prevented such action were no doubt very mixed, but they included the worthy motive of conceding to the Germans everything that was just, in the hope of winning them back to a spirit of friendship and reasonableness. The actual effect has been the opposite of this.

When people are struck forcibly by situations like these, they are naturally puzzled. When it becomes clear that life is full of such situations, they feel that the meaning has gone out of life, that existence is empty and purposeless. But this is a hard conclusion to face, and very many are unable to face it. Instead, they will welcome any gospel, however fantastic or however monstrous, which promises to put an end to such situations, to make life simple again and provide a clue to its meaning. That is the real reason why Communism and Fascism command such fervent allegiance.

It is not that people have carefully weighed the truth they contain, but their promise of a clear-cut line of action, which is infallibly right, relieves people of the bewilderment and moral frustration that modern life has brought. They come to men like a divine revelation, and inspire a quasi-religious faith and hope.

## THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

Christianity also is a gospel, coming to us as a divine revelation, and promising a clue to the meaning of existence: "the mystery which was hidden from all ages and generations, but now hath been manifested to the saints." But Christianity differs fundamentally from the other gospels of our time in the nature of its mystery. The other gospels simplify the issues of life by the direct and violent method of denying some or all of those moral principles which make the conflict; and in this way they save men from the conflict by telling them that it was all a mistake. This is to solve the problem by running away from it, and for all their loud words these gospels really amount to a confession of moral despair. But Christianity deals with the problem by facing it squarely, forcing men to look it full in the face. At the very centre of its sacred story and its worship it sets the most horrible event conceivable, and it proclaims that succour has been brought to us in and through the evil thing itself; for God has entered into the situation, and radically changed its meaning. How has this been done?

Evidently it has little to do with what is nowadays called "the teaching of Christ," i.e., moral maxims extracted from the Gospels and treated apart from the other things which are also found there. Our troubles largely arise from the fact that human wisdom, knowledge and power are limited. These limits are part of our condition as finite or temporal beings. It is at least arguable that we should experience moral perplexity even if we were not also sinners. Our troubles cannot be overcome by means of good advice, even Christ's good advice. The only possible solution is that we should somehow be endowed with new powers, coming from and belonging to another order or dimension of existence,



and that our use of these powers and their effect should be controlled by a wisdom which stands outside and above the stream of history in which we are immersed.

### A NEW PLANE OF EXISTENCE

This is what has happened, if St. Paul is to be believed; for in his writings, and in all subsequent writing that has been influenced by him, the solution of our problem is clearly expounded. It lies in the story of Christ and in our relation to Him. When God the Eternal Son became man, that in itself meant taking upon Himself great limitations. St. Paul calls it a "self-emptying"; in the details of His human life, in poverty, obscurity, persecution, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, betrayal, judicial murder, torture and public disgrace, He embraced the evils of our human state to the full. "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him," and now he is no longer the obscure prophet of Galilee or the crucified Messiah of Jerusalem, but the risen Lord, "declared to be the Son of God in power . . . by His resurrection from the dead." He has in His own person lifted human nature on to a new plane of existence; His humanity is endowed with a wisdom and a range of power which are God's, and have no limit.

But the meaning of the resurrection for us lies not in itself, but in the fact that we, the faithful, are also incorporated in this risen Christ, and are made members of His mystical body. As such we share His humiliation and sufferings, die with Him in spirit, and rise again in spirit to a life endowed with the power of His resurrection. The consummation of this process lies, no doubt, in the future, and "it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." But even here and now we possess a "first instalment" of what is to come, and already we live and work in two worlds at once. We do not cease to be limited human beings; we do not escape from the perplexities and conflicts which belong to human existence. On the contrary, we are to embrace them, and all the suffering they may bring, as a

means of doing to death self-will and pride, in mystical unity with the self-humiliation of Christ. Yet, at the same time, we have another life, "hid with Christ in God," which is not a rhetorical figure or empty metaphor, nor even a real thing promised for the future, but a present fact and power.

### THE POWER OF THE RISEN CHRIST

As the risen Christ is powerful and active everywhere on behalf of all that is good and against all that is evil, so we, who are "very members incorporate" in Him, are in Him powerful and active in places and in causes beyond what we can see, and even beyond what we can know or understand. The means by which we exercise this power (or, what is the same thing, He exercises it in and through us) is prayer. Prayer is not merely the daily round of dutiful acknowledgments to God, but a force brought into history from above and beyond, and placed as a most powerful weapon in the hands of the individual Christian and of the whole Christian community. Those who use it find themselves bound together in an invisible but real fellowship, which itself also is no ordinary historical growth, but a gift from outside history, a foretaste here of what will be hereafter, and a force here and now for the succour of our distress. For within this fellowship, and beyond its borders where its influence is felt, though the conflicts of human life are not removed, they lose their sting. Opposition provokes no enmity and bewilderment no despair when both are accepted in humility and patience, as marks of the finitude from which our ultimate deliverance is sure. And thus within this fellowship the distresses of human life are dealt with—not, as in some rival gospels, by denying the fact of conflict and perplexity, but by giving it a new meaning. The life of man in time is reinterpreted by being brought into relation with another plane of reality; and in this wider context the human spirit finds a clarity of vision, a power and a freedom not otherwise attainable.

H. A. HODGES.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street, London, W.C.2.